

Millennium Park

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The popularity of recreational parks is something that has stood the test of time. In fact, parks can be traced from the Hanging Gardens of Babylon in the Middle East to the Victorian style parks in Europe. Parks not only started as a way to improve the health of people in overcrowded, congested cities, but also to beautify the cities, thus making them more attractive to tourists. Over time, many cities in Illinois have managed to use open space as room for parks. One of these parks is located in the heart of Chicago: Millennium Park. Millennium Park has proved itself, not only an important contribution to Chicago history, but to Illinois history as well. Millennium Park's open and modern design breathes new life into downtown Chicago and provides the city with a center for recreation and entertainment.

It was originally Daniel Burnham's idea to have a park in front of Chicago's waterfront. This idea was revealed in his book about the future of Chicago, *Daniel Burnham's Plan of Chicago*, published in 1909. In 1997, Chicago's mayor, Richard M. Daley, re-invigorated Burnham's plan for a park near Chicago's waterfront. He planned for it to be a redeveloped portion of the already made Grant Park and began construction in 1998. The new park, named Millennium Park in light of its planned opening in 2000, was intended to cost around one hundred and eighty million dollars. Instead, the 24.5 acre park did not have its grand opening until 2004 due to delays and cost taxpayers three times more than expected. The final expenditure was a whopping five hundred million dollars.

Despite the criticism about delays and going over budget, Millennium Park is still looked at as the heart of Chicago. Decorated with beautiful postmodern architecture, Millennium Park is far greater than the average park. More than anything, this park is recognized as a lively place to be at with a very open environment. The park contains an ice skating rink, a concert theater for music and dance, numerous plazas, Cloud Gate, Crown Fountain, Lurie Garden, and Jay Pritzker Pavillion. Besides playing in the open space of the park, visitors can also go to concerts at the Pritzker Pavilion which seats 11,000 people. In addition to concerts, people who visit Millennium Park may also view the park's artwork from two fifty-foot video screens at Crown Fountain. Other significant events in the park include political rallies, peace demonstrations, and many private and publicly sponsored programs to benefit children. With so many forms of entertainment and opportunities to get together, running out of things to do at Millennium Park seems very unlikely.

Millennium Park becomes much more than a park, not only to its Chicago citizens, but to anyone that has ever been there. The number of people that visit this great park annually is a booming fifteen million. According to the *New York Times*, Millennium Park is one of Chicago's leading attractions; a recent article stated that the park is responsible for one and one-quarter billion dollars worth of residential development in the Chicago area. The park's influence on Chicago is the sole reason that business has grown so dramatically in the East Chicago area. Businesses want to build their headquarters in a place where they can be guaranteed there will be a big crowd. Although Millennium Park was designed in 1909, today it has turned into much more. This revolutionary park is among the best in the country and is on its way to truly

impacting Illinois history in the many years to come. Chicago would not be the same city without its central playground. Millennium Park provides Illinois with a place for recreation, exercise, entertainment, learning, and overall a unity for all different kinds of people to get together and have fun. [From "Chicago Millennium Park," *Chicago Traveler*. <http://chicagotraveler.com/chicago_millennium_park.htm>. (Oct. 5, 2006); Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *Millennium Park*; "How a Park Changed a Chicago Neighborhood," *New York Times*. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/04/realestate/04nati.html>>. (Sept. 30, 2006); and "Millennium Park Chicago," *Millennium Park*. <<http://www.millenniumpark.org/>>. (Oct. 5, 2006).